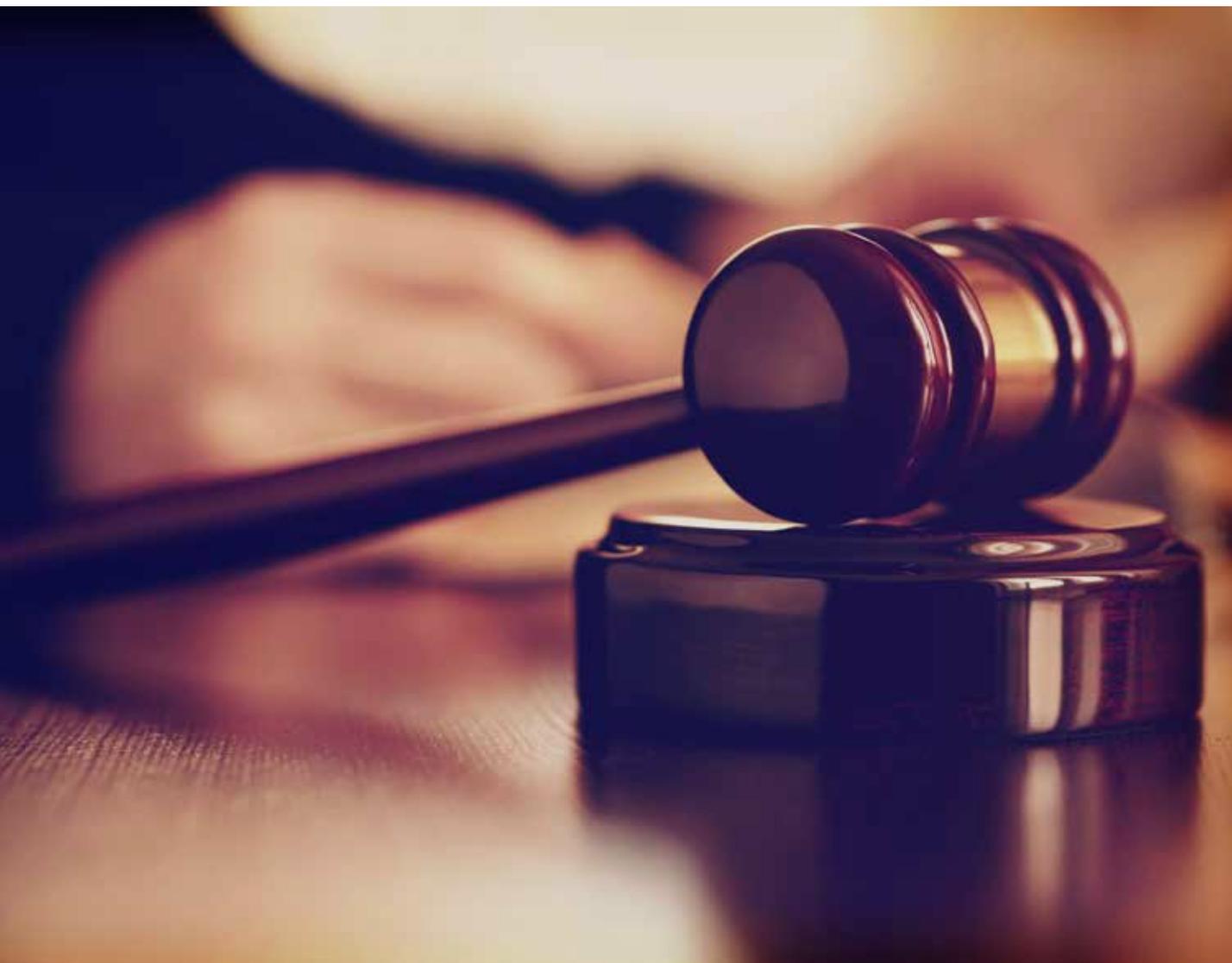


3

RESPECT AUTHORITY



What have you been taught about respecting authority?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLrelationships

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE **29**

THE POINT

*Respect the authorities
God has placed in your life.*



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

People don't always agree in our society, and that's okay. A married couple may disagree over which color to paint the living room, but they still love each other. People disagree all the time over sports, politics, entertainment, and more—yet they can still enjoy each others' company.

In short, disagreement isn't the problem today—but disrespect is a problem. A big problem. In fact, according to a recent survey, 79 percent of people in our culture view lack of respect as a serious issue in our society.¹

The Bible affirms that every human is created in the image of God (see Gen. 1:26-27). Therefore, we should treat everyone we encounter as a person of worth. Still, if we're honest, it's hard to show that type of respect to those who only look out for themselves and fail to treat others with respect.

That was the challenge David faced in 1 Samuel when King Saul kept trying to kill him. Through David's example, we'll see that we can respect those in authority without endorsing all they do.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 Samuel 24:3-7

³ When Saul came to the sheep pens along the road, a cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself. David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave, ⁴ so they said to him, “Look, this is the day the LORD told you about: ‘I will hand your enemy over to you so you can do to him whatever you desire.’” Then David got up and secretly cut off the corner of Saul’s robe.

⁵ Afterward, David’s conscience bothered him because he had cut off the corner of Saul’s robe.

⁶ He said to his men, “I swear before the LORD: I would never do such a thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed. I will never lift my hand against him, since he is the LORD’s anointed.” ⁷ With these words David persuaded his men, and he did not let them rise up against Saul. Then Saul left the cave and went on his way.

I often speak to parents of teenagers. When I ask why they teach their children to respect authority, I hear a variety of responses: “To keep order in the house.” “To teach them how to respect others.” “To help them live as respectable citizens.”

Sadly, I rarely hear what I consider to be the most important reason: we teach our children to respect authority so they will learn to honor God. After all, how can we help younger generations learn to respect the One they cannot see if they don’t learn to respect those God has put in front of them?

In 1 Samuel 24, David and his men were in a wilderness area near En-Gedi, close to the Dead Sea. When King Saul got word of David’s location, he gathered his army to give chase. David hid from him in a cave.

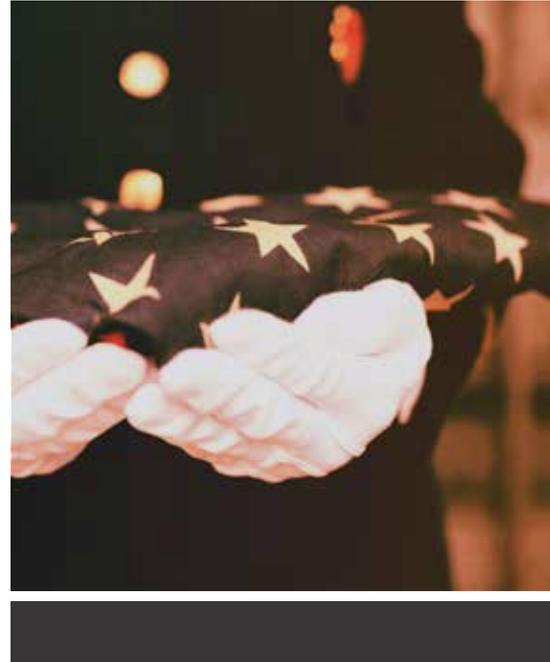
When Saul needed a bathroom break, he chose to enter the very cave where David was hiding! David’s men saw this as the opportunity given from the Lord to end Saul’s persecution. They urged David to seize this chance and rid himself of his pursuer.

How do you typically respond to the authority figures in your life?

QUESTION #2

David crept up close to Saul with his knife. He reached out—and cut off the corner of Saul’s robe. You may think, *That’s it?* But this act was far from harmless. Saul’s robe represented his position as king. Therefore, by making the kingly robe unacceptable to wear, David had symbolically invalidated Saul’s role as king.

Even though his act was symbolic, David immediately repented of his action. His “conscience bothered him,” and he directed his men to spare Saul’s life. He would not harm someone God had placed in a position of authority.



1 Samuel 24:8-11

⁸ After that, David got up, went out of the cave, and called to Saul, “My lord the king!” When Saul looked behind him, David knelt low with his face to the ground and paid homage.

⁹ David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of people who say, ‘Look, David intends to harm you?’ ¹⁰ You can see with your own eyes that the LORD handed you over to me today in the cave. Someone advised me to kill you, but I took pity on you and said: I won’t lift my hand against my lord, since he is the LORD’s anointed. ¹¹ Look, my father! Look at the corner of your robe in my hand, for I cut it off, but I didn’t kill you. Recognize that I’ve committed no crime or rebellion. I haven’t sinned against you even though you are hunting me down to take my life.”

This passage highlights six ways David showed respect to Saul in spite of the King’s persecution:

1. David confronted Saul, but he spoke with honor and respect. David acknowledged Saul’s position and status over him when he “called to Saul, ‘My lord the king!’”
2. David bowed as a sign of respect to the king.

What do you like best about David’s approach in these verses?

QUESTION #3

3. David urged the king not to listen to the advisors who wrongly accused David of seeking Saul's life. In the same way, David refused to listen to his own men who encouraged him to kill Saul.
4. David offered evidence to show his respect for the king. This evidence—the corner of Saul's robe—proved David had no desire to commit treason or harm the king.
5. David called Saul "my father."
6. David showed how seriously he took his treatment of the king as a mark of his relationship with God. Although the king sought David's life, David would never sin against him.

We see something similar in the life of Paul. The apostle lived under harsh leadership and ministered during periods of intense persecution—he was even martyred during the reign of Roman Emperor Nero.

But in Paul's writings, he did not speak against these authority figures, nor did he encourage believers to do so. Instead, Paul urged his readers to pray for those in authority (see 1 Tim. 2:1).

Like David and Paul, we also are liable to encounter authority figures with shortcomings, and maybe even evil intentions. In those moments, we'll do well to remember that we're also sinners. Our entire lives are built on God's grace, and we should exhibit that same grace in our responses to those over us.

We should respect the authority figures in our lives because we believe that God has placed them in our lives. It's that simple.

What are some ways we can imitate David's actions and attitudes in our own dealings with authority?

QUESTION #4

1 Samuel 24:12

¹²“May the LORD judge between me and you, and may the LORD take vengeance on you for me, but my hand will never be against you.”

Let’s face it: it’s hard to leave our conflicts in God’s hands. We’d all like to have at least a little control over what happens to those who do us wrong—especially those in authority.

That being the case, we can learn a lot from David’s example in verse 12:

- ▶ **Leave judgment in God’s hands.** “May the LORD judge between me and you.” Why is it that we can trust God with our eternity, but we can’t seem to trust Him with our daily relationships?
- ▶ **Leave your reputation in God’s hands.** When David said, “May the LORD take vengeance on you for me,” he was yielding his reputation to God. The “don’t get mad, get even” mentality is common in our culture. Yet when we consider the cost of Christ’s death to give us redemption and forgiveness, our perspective should be increasingly God-focused. When that happens, we become less concerned about our reputations and more focused on Christ.
- ▶ **Leave vengeance in God’s hands.** Even as David expressed a desire for God to take vengeance, he determined he would not seek vengeance himself. “My hand will never be against you.”

God alone has the authority to exact such vengeance. We can confront those who wrong us in order to seek justice, and we can work through the governing authorities God has given us to see that justice is done (see Rom. 13:1-4). But vengeance is a wholly different matter that only God has the right to demand.

The life of faith we live as followers of Christ calls us to die to seeking vengeance for ourselves. Instead, we’re called to trust God as the Just One, and we’re called to extend His grace to others—including those in authority.

Why is it hard to leave vengeance in the hands of the Lord?

QUESTION #5

R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Use the following acronym to record the names of people and organizations who have authority in your life, and therefore deserve your respect. (An example has been provided.)

Mothe**R**
E
S
P
E
C
T

What are some ways to actively remind yourself of the need to show respect to the authority figures in your life?



LIVE IT OUT

How will you honor Christ this week by respecting the authority figures in your life? Consider the following suggestions:

- ▶ **Encourage.** We live in a day when authority is questioned more than honored. Be intentional about expressing support and encouragement to an authority figure in your life.
- ▶ **Pray.** Follow the principle in 1 Timothy 2:1 and pray regularly for those in authority. Make this a part of your regular prayer life each day.
- ▶ **Repent.** If there's someone in authority to whom you have failed to show proper honor or respect, confess that to God. Change your attitude and, as appropriate, apologize to that person for your former lack of respect.



We need disagreements in our world today. We need different perspectives and a robust exchange of ideas. But we don't need disrespect. Instead, choose to honor the authority figures God has placed in your life.

My thoughts

1. Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, "Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America," *Public Agenda* [online] [cited 18 September 2016] Available from the Internet: publicagenda.org/media/aggravating-circumstances, 10.

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLrelationships**